

**Text: Acts 25.1-12**

As we come to chapter 25, a lot of the material will seem like “déjà vu, all over again,” in the words of the great philosopher, Yogi Berra.

Nothing much new is said in this chapter. We will see a repetition of themes we’ve seen before.

I checked online to see how others handled the chapter. Mostly what I found were preachers using big chunks of text for their messages. There isn’t much to drill down on, to get into the weighty details of words and theology.

Alas!

However, we should make some progress as we cover this chapter, so there is that.

Our text today will take us through the first twelve verses, but I want to read the whole chapter so you get a sense of what I mean.

Read Acts 25.1-27, text 1-12

Our focus today is on the appeal to Caesar. I’m calling it...

### *The Fateful Step*

As we think about these events, we are going to have in our mind the idea of providence, how life works out in God’s plan. We will talk a lot about choices we make and about God’s will.

**Providence:** “By providence we mean the continuing action of God by which he preserves in existence the creation he has brought into being, and guides it to his intended purposes for it.”<sup>1</sup>

**Not miraculous intervention**, like when the Lord delivered Peter out of Herod’s prison.

**Rather, continuous oversight** and **unseen direction**, where God’s purposes come to pass despite human opposition.

**Proposition:** The will of God for our lives may not work out as we expect, but it is better to trust God’s will than man’s will.

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), 413.

## I. Implacable opposition (1-5)

A. The main thing to see here is how the hatred of the Jews persists after two years

1. We have a new high priest by this time: Ishmael ben Phiabi (acc. to Josephus)
2. Porcius Festus, new on the scene, moves efficiently to meet his local leading men (Sanhedrin)
  - a. Seems more energetic than Felix, and more honorable
  - b. Appointed by Nero AD 59
  - c. Succeeded in suppressing brigands and revolutionaries during his term
  - d. However, died suddenly in AD 62 of an illness, so shortened his term of office

“Like Felix, Festus found himself unable to rise above the pressure exerted by the Jewish power structures and ultimately compromised his sense of justice with respect to Paul.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Immediately after Festus arrives in Jerus., the Jews raise the Paul question
  - a. The lingering presence of Paul in the land is more important to them than any other issue (including public peace and safety)
  - b. They ask that Paul be brought to Jerus., intending to kill him in the way
  - c. Request expressed in imperfect tense: much talking, repeated urgings
  - d. Determined to kill Paul
    - 1) Two yrs earlier, an outside group proposed this, they acceded

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<sup>2</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 488.

2) Now, they plan assassination rather than grant approval to a proxy

B. There is a subtext: God uses Festus to protect Paul

1. Festus may suspect a rat, so insists on holding a hearing in Caesarea (or he may be naïve, thinking only of his own convenience)
2. The decision has the effect of preserving Paul from attack, and probably preserves his life
3. Thus, God is at work – using Felix to protect Paul

### In Sum:

The Jews, two years on, are still completely all in on their hatred for Paul. They want him dead.

Festus, though highly motivated to gain local confidence, nevertheless protects Paul.

## II. Irresponsible officialdom (6-10)

A. Yet another unresolved trial (6-8)

1. Festus calls Paul before the *bema* (βῆμα) (6)
  - a. Notice: “the next day” — Festus is right on it when he returns
  - b. Notice the word “tribunal” – *bema*, the same word as used in “the judgement seat of Christ” (see 2 Cor 5)

“used to denote a raised place or platform, reached by steps, ... [at] the place of assembly; from the platform orations were made. The word became used for a tribune, two of which were provided in the law courts of Greece, one for the accuser and one for the defendant; it was applied to the tribunal of a Roman magistrate or ruler ...”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1996), 337–38.

“used by officials in addressing an assembly, often on judicial matters — ‘judgment seat, judgment place.’”<sup>4</sup>

2. The Jews surround Paul and bombard him with unprovable accusations (7)
  - a. Luke simply summarizes here
  - b. From Paul’s response, the charges seem the same as in the trial of Felix, with no evidence offered

“Repetition and reiteration and vehemence took the place of proof...”<sup>5</sup> (Like the preacher’s outline note: “point weak, yell louder”)

3. Concludes with Paul’s emphatic denial (8)
  - a. He broke no law of the Jews
  - b. He broke no rule of the temple
  - c. He broke no law of Caesar

They have provided no evidence for their charges, he can’t be convicted of them.

The right conclusion of this matter should have been immediate release...

## B. Yet more ongoing irresolution and irresponsibility from Festus (9-10)

1. Festus seeks political solutions rather than a legal solution
  - a. Wants to establish good relations with the Jews (remember, less than two weeks in office)
  - b. Offers to hold a trial in Jerusalem with him presiding
    - 1) The offer (rather than an order) shows he knows he is on thin ice legally: Paul is a Roman
    - 2) Yet it shows Festus is under political pressure

<sup>4</sup> Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 90.

<sup>5</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 25.7.

“Festus’s motives were not altogether innocent. Luke hinted at this by noting that Festus wanted to grant the Jews a ‘favor’ (v. 9a). It was such favoritism that had kept Paul in prison for two years (cf. 24:27). Earlier Festus had refused the Jews the ‘favor’ of transferring Paul to Jerusalem (v. 3). Now he was bending to their political pressure.”<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Paul rejects Festus’ offer (10)

- a. He is a Roman, charged with sedition [ultimately against Caesar], so the trial ought to be a Roman trial
- b. He has done no wrong to the Jews, a well-known fact, even to Festus

Essentially, Paul is making a subtle criticism: Festus knew the facts, he ought to let Paul go.

## C. Paul’s dangerous position

1. If Festus sent Paul to Jerusalem for trial, the Jews would either
  - a. Set upon him in the way and try to kill him
  - b. Find some way to sentence him to death in a mock trial
2. Festus is starting to compromise in the Jewish direction: Paul has no guarantees of safety if he agrees to a change of venue

The course of events is unfavorable, hopes are vanishing as the trial proceeds...

Despite the animosity of the Jews...

Despite the irresponsibility of the governor...

All is working out in God’s plan. Remember, God said to Paul:

Ac 23.11 ¶ But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”

<sup>6</sup> Polhill, Acts, 490.

### III. Irremediable option (11-12)

#### A. The appeal to Caesar (11)

##### 1. Paul's either/or logic

- a. If I am a wrongdoer, I do not refuse to die (will make no protest)
- b. If I am not guilty, no one has the right to turn me over to these men
  - 1) Lit. "no one is able to freely give me to them"
  - 2) Paul means that Festus would have no authority to take such a step
  - 3) He also means to show up Festus' craven desire for approval in entertaining the idea of giving Paul up

The logic is an appeal for justice: if justice were done, Paul would be free.

##### 2. The trial concludes with the dramatic, "I appeal to Caesar"

- a. Caesar at this time is Nero (but during the "good Nero" period)
- b. The term for the appeal is *provocatio*
  - 1) The right of appeal goes well back into the history of ancient Rome, the right of citizens in a republic

"This type of appeal is one of the oldest Roman ancient rights, dating back to 509 BC."<sup>7</sup>
  - 2) By the 1<sup>st</sup> c., this became a right of appeal to the highest official in the land
  - 3) Usually came after conviction, but could come before if the accused thought something was wrong with the process

#### B. The appeal granted (12)

1. Some commentators think Festus had no choice once the appeal was made

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<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 702–3.

- a. However: he consulted with his advisors
- b. He ruled in favor of the appeal

All of this (and some historical documents) seem to indicate that even here, Festus could have released Paul.

## 2. The appeal to Caesar solves Festus' problems

- a. He doesn't have to give a favor to the Jews, nor does he have to offend them
- b. He can claim his hands are tied, Paul is a Roman, and in his rights

## 3. Festus could have released Paul, but he consigns him to Rome: there is no remedy now, the appeal must be formalized

While Paul languished in custody, waiting for Felix to make a ruling, he little expected this result.

Now he was going to Rome, just as the Lord promised. He just wasn't going the way he expected.

## Conclusion:

You often hear the phrase, "everything happens for a reason." Even unbelievers use the phrase, a subtle nod to God who controls the universe.

But we aren't fatalists – we are actors on the stage of life. The major lesson for us in this passage and others we've seen in Acts is that in all things we must trust God.

We may never know all God's purposes or reasons for why things work out the way they do, but we must learn to trust God and seek his known will in our life.

**Proposition:** The will of God for our lives may not work out as we expect, but it is better to trust God's will than man's will.

What do you want out of life? What plans do you have? What will you do if your plans don't work out exactly as you hope?

Will you still follow the Lord?

That's our lesson for today. It is better to trust God's will than man's will, including our own.